

## FROM REVEREND DAVID JAMES

I have been, as the old Christian song goes, 'counting my blessings'. One of them which I have duly named, is that my e-mail has gone AWOL. My youngest son, soon to go to Afghanistan, arranged for me to have a new address. Since then the most frequent message I get is 'Message undelivered' – return to sender'. My secret hope is that he will forget to get it fixed before he leaves, and then I shall be forced to revert to quill pens – just like we used to do.

This electro-mechanical lapse has meant that I have been unable to receive or contribute to various on going discussions. It has also meant that the world and the church have been deprived of my pearls of wisdom!! The silence on the subject of this mutual absence has been deafening.

There has, however, been an important consequence. I have had time to think about lots of things – among them being the partnership. Some of that thinking might be valuable – so I want to use more conventional means of communication to reflect.

The partnership is Developing. We have come along way since the early days. Some of the visions have come to pass, some new one emerged, others in the process of coming to be, some put

aside. I think the extent of this development should not be underestimated, and it has been a surprise to some, including some in 'the diocese'. Particularly as, in some places, this progress has been marked by traumatic events which would have daunted many had they been foreseen. This development has been a credit to a variety of people who have used their gifts and skills to facilitate this growth especially when the process has been difficult to understand, even unpopular. Credit also to those who have had the courage to change their minds, who have the perception to 'suck it and see'.

The partnership is Diverse. We have almost everything. Long may it be so. The Church of England is a community church where admirals meet with hippies, tree huggers share the Eucharist with developers, groovy chicks minister to elderly ladies and vice versa. Let alone the myriad churchmanships that alternately blight and enrich us. This wonder of diversity and inclusiveness means that we have to face head on some of the issues that 'modern life' (whatever that is) throws at us. There will be differences of opinion, tensions, even arguments. But the genius had been to live at one with each other even when these differences

are great. My guess (and my prayer) is that we shall do that long after the silly attempts to make us conform and 'covenant' has been forgotten.

The partnership is Difficult. Of course it is. So, actually, is learning Russian, understanding rock music, reading racing form. Neither did Jesus promise that discipleship would be easy. The call to adjust familiar patterns of church life is frequently cited as being challenging, but my feeling is that extending the boundaries of church life to engage and encompass the community is a much more daunting prospect. The process of inward and personal growth is often as difficult

and painful as any outward and more obvious change. Yet all this is part and parcel of our discipleship and the partnership should encourage and equip us. Recognising that in one sense we shall never 'arrive' because new issues will always confront us, new opportunities for mission always emerge.

What have we started here? God knows. All I know is that in this 3D process we must move forward with wisdom, openness and enthusiasm. Be ready to adjust, experiment, adapt, encourage real collaboration, co-operation, enrichment and acknowledge that 'it is good for us to be here'.

That's what I think, anyway.